

Fourth-graders plead case for state crustacean

By Michelle Cole, The Oregonian

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SALEM -- The legislative sponsors wore big red stuffed crabs on their heads during Monday's House debate. They talked about the Dungeness crab's economic value to Oregon. They noted that the crabs are "fierce and independent" just like the people of Oregon.

Nobody laughed.

The measure in question would make the Dungeness crab the official state crustacean. It was backed by a powerful lobby -- fourth-graders from Sunset Primary School in West Linn.

The students are studying the states this year and learned that Maryland and Louisiana both have state crustaceans. Why not Oregon?

The fourth-graders persuaded several legislators to introduce the bill. They testified in committee and, on Monday, made sure one of their "brochures" was on every House member's desk.

Bailey Johnston, 9, and her classmates filled the House gallery, fingers crossed, watching the vote.

They took nothing for granted. Earlier this year a similar measure designating an official state berry was squashed.

But the crab -- or the lobbyists backing it -- prevailed. The resolution passed unanimously.

After the vote, the Dungeness crab commission handed out crab cocktails in plastic champagne glasses, smelling up the first floor of the Capitol.

Though pleased, the fourth-graders still weren't ready to celebrate. This was just the first big vote.

Zoe Craig, 10, learned her civics lessons well. There's still, she said, the Senate and the governor to win over.

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